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SUBJECT: TRIBAL LEADER ATTACKED IN CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY
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¶1. (C) On January 27, tribal leaders favoring the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord came under attack on their way to a meeting of the CHT Land Commission in Khagrachhari district headquarters. CHT Regional Council Chairman Shantu Larma and a few others sustained minor injury in the attacks. Larma has blamed a rival tribal group opposed to the Peace Accord for the violence and threatened action against them. The attack is sure to raise tensions in the Hill Tracts, which have recently seen an increase in development activity and a decrease in military presence.

Shantu Larma Attacked
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¶2. (SBU) On January 27, the motorcade of Jotiridnriyo Bodhi Priyo Larma, popularly known as Shantu Larma, the chairman of the CHT Regional Council and president of Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), came under attack at Mahalchhari in Khagrachhari hill district. Larma and two of his companions received minor injuries from when car windows broke as the attackers pelted them with stones. Larma said his motorcade came under attack at three places on way to Khagrachhari from Rangamati and his bodyguards exchanged gunfire with the attackers. It is about a two-hour drive between the two hill district headquarters.

¶3. (SBU) The Chakma Circle Chief or the "Chakma King", Devashish Roy, who was in Larma's motorcade, remained unhurt. Roy served as an Adviser in the 2007 - 2008 Caretaker Government. Two of the PCJSS leaders, Barun Chakma and Udayan Tripura, sustained minor injuries and received first aid in Khagrachhari. About 40 minutes after the attacks in Mahalchhari on Larma's motorcade, the motorcade of Rangamati Hill District chairman, Nikhil Kumar Chakma, came under a similar attack at a place called Gilachhari in Rangamati. UPDF Blamed for Attack
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¶4. (SBU) On his arrival at Khagrachhari Circuit House, the venue for the Land Commission meeting, Larma told the media that members of the United Peoples' Democratic Front (UPDF), a rival tribal organization which opposes the Peace Accord he signed with the Bangladesh government in 1997 to end a decades-old insurgency, had launched the attack on him to undo the peace process. Larma said the government, despite his repeated requests, had not taken action against UPDF elements out to create troubles. Larma threatened to initiate action against them by himself if the government did not do so. UPDF has denied involvement in the incident. Meanwhile, PCJSS activists in Rangamati, the headquarters of the CHT Regional Council, went out on the street in processions and blocked a major road to protest the attacks on their leaders.

Comment

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15. (C) After relative peace in the CHT over the past few months, today's attacks on the PCJSS leaders seem to have targeted the peace process under the 1997 Accord rather than Mr. Larma as an individual. Since taking office in January, the Awami League Government has been under pressure to fully implement the 1997 accord, including by decreasing security forces presence in the Hill Tracks. The separate attacks on the Rangamati Hill District chairman while he was on his way to the Land Commission meeting suggest renewed efforts to thwart implementation of the Accord by the UPDF, which demands full autonomy or independence rather than the limited autonomy for the CHT region granted under the Accord. Pressure will now be on the government to deal firmly with the UPDF before the PCJSS go seek revenge. Opposition parties who opposed the 1997 Accord are likely to seek to gain political mileage out of this incident. The U.S. and other donors have been increasing development activities in the CHT in recent years. For these efforts to succeed fully there needs to be a broader consensus about future implementation of the 1997 Accord.

MORIARTY